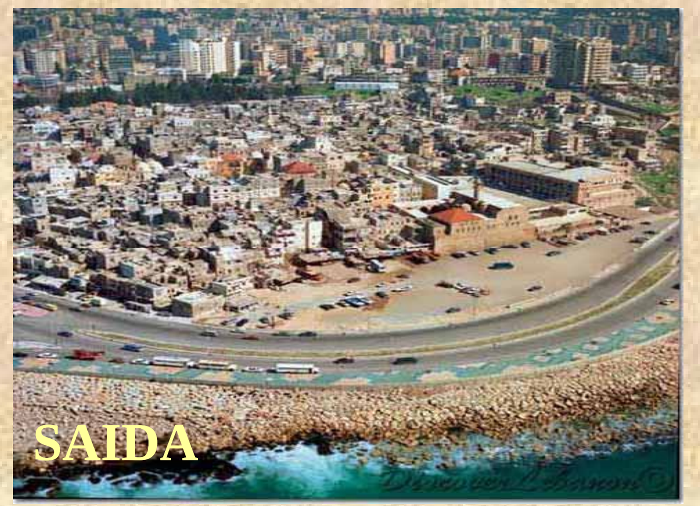


Sidon : A Mediterranean City
With a testimony of History

CENTRE FOR CONSERVATION & PRESERVATION OF ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Since the very early ages of history, Lebanon urbanization and architecture had a very distinguished character that has been a manifestation of the originality of its peoples and the deeply-rooted affiliation to the national soil and featuring their peoples' traditions and customs and physically linked to their environment.

Sidon has been inhabited since 4000 BC as Neolithic Times (6000- 4000 BC). It was one of the most important Phoenician cities.



Sidon,or Saïda, (Arabic: صيدا, Ṣaydā; Phoenician: Ṣydwn; Greek: Σιδών; Latin: Sidon; Hebrew: צידון, Ṣīḏōn, Turkish: Sayda) is the third-largest city in Lebanon.

Sidon, is located on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea and is the Capital of the southern region of Lebanon. Sidon is a city of long history and its name is associated with the Phoenician god of fishing, Sd, and its name is mentioned in *Tel El Amarna Tablets* and in the Ugarit, Hebrew, Hittites, and Aramaic, ancient Syrian and Greek texts.



Homer named it "**the brass city**" and was famous in ancient history for tanning and glass manufacturing and Strabo (died in 42 BC) said that it was the home of knowledge and its people were philosophers and scholars in astronomy and arithmetic.

The historical core of Saida is a Mamluk-era old city that extends between the Sea Castle and the St. Louis Castle. It has flourished and experienced its golden age between the end of the 6th century BC and the middle of 4th century BC, during the Persian era.

Many cultural influences, including the Egyptian Pharaohs and the Greeks, have contributed to the formation of the cultural outlook of the city. In the years before Jesus, Sidon had many conquerors: Assyrians, Babylonians, Egyptians, Greeks, and finally Romans.





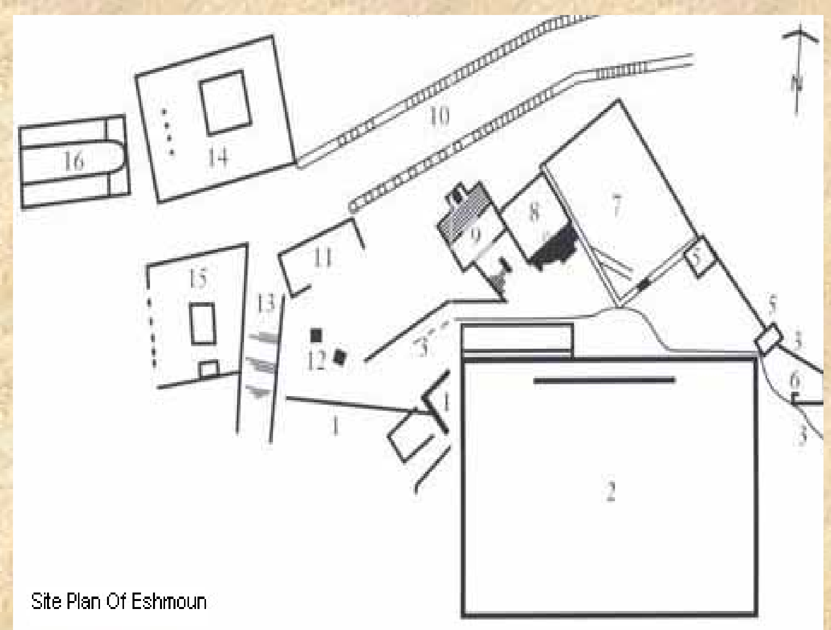
The Bronze age (3200–1200 BC) saw the birth of Lebanon's first fortified villages, the development of commercial and maritime activities and the invention of the world's first alphabet in Byblos.
The Iron age (1200 – 333 BC) in Lebanon saw the climax of the Phoenician civilization.

After its revolt against the Persians and its destruction in 351 B.C., Sidon never regained its former glory.





The temple of Eshmoun built by Eshmounazar II at the end of the 7th century B.C. and later additions were made in the following centuries. It was destroyed around the middle of the fourth century B.C. Although the temple was never rebuilt, some small buildings, chapels and pools were restored.



Site Plan Of Eshmoun







In the Phoenician age, Sidon became a major sea port and was exposed several times, throughout its long history, to destruction at the hands of the Philistines, Assyrians and Persians and was struck two times by devastating earthquakes, in 551 AD and 573 AD.

The Hellenic period (333 – 64 BC), the decisive victory won by Alexander the great (20/21 July 356 – 10/11 June 323 BC) over the Persian king Darius III opened Phoenicia to the Greek conqueror.



The exquisite Phoenician, Greek and Roman sarcophagi found on site were swiftly transported to Archaeological Museum of Istanbul.

After Alexander's death, Phoenicia first came under Ptolemaic rule from Egypt.



Sidon's famous Sea Castle is one of the most prominent archaeological sites in the city. The Crusader period, between 1110 and 1291 A.D., brought Sidon new prestige as the second of the four baronies of the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Sidon Sea Castle was built by the Crusaders in 1228 A.D. on a small island connected to the mainland by a causeway. The castle consists primarily of two towers connected by a wall. In the outer walls Roman columns were used as horizontal reinforcements, a feature often seen in fortifications built on or near former Roman sites.





Castle of St Louis (13th century):

The ruins of this once-impressive castle stand on a mound to the south of town. The present structure dates back to the Crusaders, who built on the site of an earlier Fatimid fortress - as reflected in the local name, Qala'at al-Muizz (Fortress of Al-Muizz) after the Fatimid caliph Al-Muizz li-Din Allah, who fortified the site.

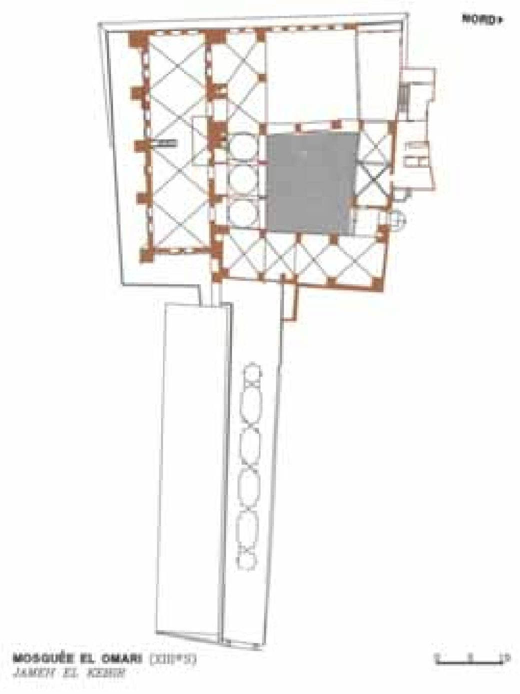




Umari Mosque:



The origin of this building goes back to the second period of rule Crusader (626 to 691 AH / 1228 to 1291 A.D. The building was established by Knights Hospitallers belonging to the Church of St. John the Baptist in Jerusalem in the period between 659 to 690 AH / 1260 to 1291 A.D. The Baḥrit Mamluk sultan al-Ashraf Khalīl ibn Qalāwūn ended the crusader rule in Sidon in 690 AH / 1291 A.D. The building became a mosque since 690 AH / 1291 A.D. and since then, it was called Umari Mosque with relation related to the name of the caliph Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb.







Sidon (16 th - 17th century):

The situation of the city improved in the middle Ages and flourished early in the **17th century** under the reign of Prince Fakhraddine (1572 - 1635 A.D.) and by active trade with Europe.

We find inside and outside the walls of Sidon two groups of palaces characterized by their uniqueness and beauty and remained as models the architectural style that was prevailing in the past centuries. The European linkage with Sidon dates back to the era of Prince Fakhraddine as far back as the 16th century where there were trade ties with Italy and France causing the emergence of some features of the Tuscan Architecture in Sidon's architecture.
The buildings constructed in the late 18th century and 19th century inside the walls of the city is palaces that carried later on the names of their owners, such as Palace of Abaza, Palace of Debbane, Palace of Al Ghafri and House of Seliman Basha Al-Faransawī and are characterized by a style combining the Arab and Tuscan arts.





Early in the **19^{th} Century**, in 1837, the city was exposed to a devastating earthquake that caused the collapse of many buildings. John Caren mentioned that the population of Sidon was between 8,000 to 9,000 inhabitants and that the city has irregular alleys and exports cotton yarn, silk, wheat, oil and timber and imports fabric, spices and iron.

The city started to expand beyond the walls and this took place and is still going on by means of annexation of huge areas of the coast and eastward of the city; and the trade center moved gradually along the roads recently built for long distances.



Houses in the 19th Century:

There were trends in Sidon that lasted for centuries and polished the society and interacted with many civilizations which brought the inherited conception of the form of residence, the style of mosque, the centers of administration, the nature and type of markets and, hence, it had architecture dating back to the 19th century existing in harmony with each other in terms of form, composition and architectural style and forming a comprehensive architectural fabric despite the trade links with the countries of the Mediterranean basin.

After World War I it became part of the French Mandate of Lebanon.



Muhammad Rafiq and Muhammad Bahgat give a detailed description of the city in the early 20 century: "if Homer was alive nowadays, he would have named the city "the emerald city" because the western, northern and southern plains extending toward the blue sea are emerald all along and spring is everlasting in Sidon as its gardens stretch for almost 2 hours north- and south-ward and are planted with all kinds of orange, lemon, almond, banana and other fruits.



"The city of Sidon, which extends from north to south and toward the west, is rich in sceneries and the beauty of this green town is enhanced by the hills of Al- Raihan Mount standing behind the gardens from the eastern side and the villages of Al-Hilāliyya and Al Barāmiyya glittering from afar like diamond and, in particular, it's marvelous colorful palaces which are a manifestation of the craftsmanship and care of its builder"



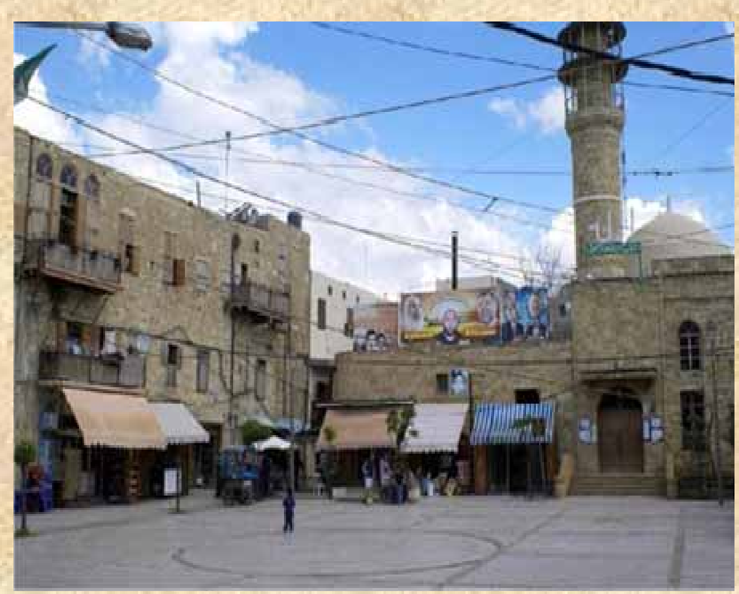




Characteristic urban elements of Saida:

The city of Sidon is unique for it has a variety buildings and sites of heritage with a multitude of functions such as residences, trade markets, baths and fortresses for defense. Sidon is characterized by the presence of an abundant number of historic buildings, such as mosques, houses, castles and markets as well as integrated districts comprising a comprehensive urban fabric. Architecture in Sidon is the outcome of many interactions and was influenced by the topographical features (sea and mainland) and the ethnic structure of the population.

The grid of narrow and straight crossing roads is one of the features of Sidon: they are covered partly in a number of places and pass beneath buildings of 2 or 3 floors; this very homogeneous structure dates back to the early 19th century.

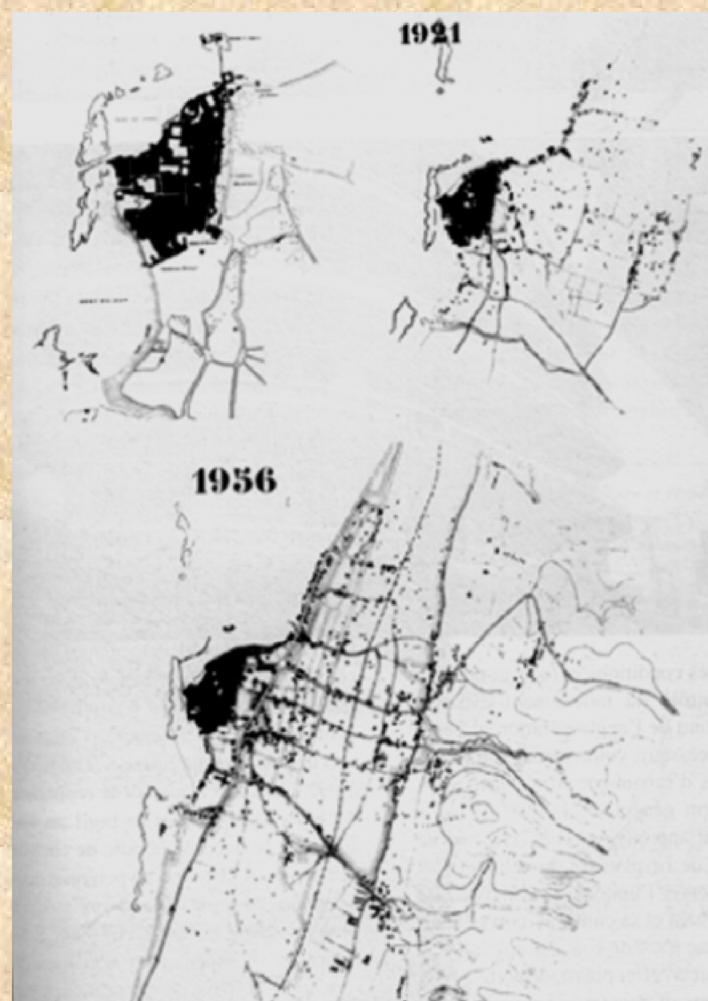




Several factors had affected Sidon historic core. The outbreak of civil war in Lebanon in 1975 had multiple consequences for the city's economic, demographic and physical character, whose impact can still be felt today.

The city flourished and grew up in some sort of contradiction with its natural environs: the center of activities shifted gradually northward and the old city maintained the network of roads and the buildings which most of them date back to the end of the 18th century and the early 19th century.





Progressive Move Out of the city
Michel ***Ecochard in Al Madina, 1997***

I hope I could have explained with these few words the development of the old city of Sidon which represents an important model of the ancient urbanization and civil planning in Lebanon in particular and the east in general, where all functional elements concentrate in a relatively limited area in the old city.

The development must be followed side by side with the process of conservation of cultural heritage in order to resuscitate life on full scale to the historic area of Sidon which has always promoted and enriched the minds and souls of mankind all over the world and in order to create sustainable development whose ultimate aim is to restore the intimate relationship between man and built heritage to preserve the cultural heritage and to enhance the residents'standards culturally, socially , economically and increasing tolerance and understanding between mankind.



THANK YOU FOR
YOUR KIND ATTENTION

